

The Athenian Mercury.

Saturday, March 16. 1695

Quest. 1. **I** Must beg your Opinion concerning an unhappy Gentlewoman of my acquaintance, who had a Child by one who left her miserable. After which another Gentleman fell in Love with her, but would not marry her, because he knew her former miscarriage; but they made strict Vows to God, and each other, in a Church, and at several other times; after which he own'd her for his Wife to all the World, and has had several Children by her: Neither have broke their Vows, but live faithfully with each other. The Reason of their not making use of the Set-Form of Matrimony, is, because he can't bear the Reproach 'twould be to him, being a very high-spirited and passionate man. She doubts not of his Fidelity, only desires your advice, in point of Religion, Whether she may come to the Sacrament, the Ceremony of the Matrimonial Words being only Law, and the Vow to God is all, which they have not broken.

Ans. You seem to argue very warmly for your Acquaintance, as if you were nearly concern'd in the matter. But 'tis the same, let it fall where 'twill. The Excuses here mentioned, being as common as those of Clippers, and other Offenders, who fancy they only break the King's Laws, which they flatter themselves is no Crime against Heaven. The Truth is, in both cases, they first run into Wickedness, and then, when they find something within that won't let 'em Rest, are always coining Excuses to give 'em a little Ease. Nothing is more common then the case we here meet with, and 'tis impossible to tell how many thousands have been ruin'd by the same methods. Your Friend, it seems, was resolv'd to go on as she had begun, and to atone some acts of folly with a habit of wickedness; since nothing can be plainer then that she lives in a Course of Fornication. Some solemnity before witness, having been in all Nations, accounted necessary to Matrimony; whereas if concubinage were sufficient, nay and this on a formal compact, there would be ne'r a Whore in Venice. But besides this, the particular Laws of our Country require a publick contract for life, as essential to marriage; illegitimizing whatever Children are born out of such lawful wedlock; and there's no doubt but those who resist the just ordinances of their Country, shall receive to themselves damnation. Not to add the sin against the Church as well as State, which as we have known separated, so may at any time be distinguish'd from one another. And this same Church tells her, "That whoever is in adultery, or any other grievous sin, are to repent before they come to that Holy Table, unless they'd eat and drink their own Damnation; and no Repentance certainly while she goes on in her sins."

Quest. 2, 3, 4. *Whether that proverb be true, He that's born to be hang'd shall never be drown'd? Whether poor people are as handsom as Rich? Whether the World as it grows Older grows Wiser?*

Ans. We can't say it does by the Questions we receive; and others will it may be apt to draw the same conclusion from our Answers.

Quest. 5. *I have lost a young Ladie's affections, of a considerable Fortune, by the treachery of a pretended Bosom-Friend, who being familiar in the Family has given*

her several forged Letters in my name, which she has resented so ill that I despair of recovering my Interest in her. Your advice how I shall punish him, and recover her Favour, will oblige yours, &c.

Ans. 'Tis well if this Bosom-Friend of yours (a He-Friend we hope) been't himself in Love with the Lady: If he be, your best revenge will be to undeceive and marry her; but the question is how you shall do it: If you can't speak with her, you must write to her and vindicate your self, or get some better Friend then your former to undertake the office.

Quest. 6. *A Person who has a great Indifference for marriage, [That may be.] thinks her self very happy [she knows we can't disprove her.] and is extremely possess'd with the Fears of a bad Husband [but is not a bad House better then no House at all?] Desires to know if an old maid be really so great a Bugbear as that the Fear of it shou'd oblige her to marry against all sense and reason?*

Ans. O! such a terrible Bugbear that you never saw any thing like it, (unless now and then you look in a Glass) and the very approach of such a Creature has frighten'd many a good Virgin out of her Wits and into Matrimony: To avoid either of which perilous rocks, the Querist must steer as exactly between 'em both as she can possible; neither hearkning to any Huge-He-Syrens that wou'd snap her up at a morsel and away with her, and digest her and her Fortunes before the year's at an end, nor yet stay so long till the Market be over; and she's turn'd upon her own Hands.

Quest. 7. *Gentlemen, your answer is desired to these following queries.*

1. *Whether it is the Duty of every Good and Humble Christian, to look upon himself to be the worst and Greatest of Sinners?*

2. *How such a man may with truth affirm himself to be such a one, because perhaps he hears and sees others swear and lie, and commit other greivous sins which he commits not.*

Ans. No, it can never be any man's duty to believe a Falseshood. St. Paul indeed speaks something of himself, that seems to sound like what the querist aims at, but he soon adds the Reason [because he persecuted the Church of Christ.] 'Tis true every man ought to consider his own Sins with all their just aggravations, but he can never think 'twill please God to accuse himself where he is not guilty. Which is a false humility, not that true Christian temper which teaches us to think justly, tho moderately of things and persons. We say, a good man can never be oblig'd to think or call himself what he is not, especially he ought to have a care he does not confess that to God which he does not believe himself, and wou'd be very angry if any other shou'd believe it of him, much less to call himself the worst of sinners when he believes himself one of the best of Saints; nay, that the rest of mankind are shut up in God's wrath, which the Pharisees did believe, tho the Publicans and Harlots sooner enter'd into Heaven. In short, our Judgment is, that true Humility consists chiefly in this; namely making as large allowances for the weaknesses of others, and
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little for our own, and o't'other's de, magnifying another man's virtues, even tho he's our Enemy, and thinking as temperately and modestly of our own accomplishments, as will consist, in both cases, with the Rules of Truth and Justice.

Quest. 8. *A beneficed Clergy-man being indebted to severe Creditors, who will not accept of such payments as his circumstances enable him to make, is constrained to absent from his living to avoid a Prison:*

Quest. *Whether he ought to resign the living, since he cannot personally attend it; or, if he is not obliged in Conscience to resign it, whether the Bishop may lawfully, or shou'd in Conscience deprive him, an able Curate being kept upon the place?*

You are desired, Gentlemen, to consider this seriously, and answer it as fully as possible, because it may afford matter for your farther discussing.

We hope this is not another Old Gentleman; but if be, we shall endeavour to give it a just Answer.

Ans. He ought first, to consider with himself whether his own extravagance or folly han't reduc'd him to such Extremities. There being not many Instances where a man keeps a good reputation, that his Creditors will be so violent as these are here represented.

But however he finds it, he is not, we think, oblig'd immediately to resign, since, tho he can't at present attend it in person, he may perhaps hereafter be in better circumstances; nor is there any necessity of its being neglected tho he himself can't be present at it; which if it be, and he leaves none to officiate, he virtually resigns it, tho he makes no formal Resignation. Though (we humbly conceive) his Ordinary is not oblig'd to deprive him; nor can it fairly be done, if there be one who takes good care of his people, in his absence, unless in such a case where actual Residence is requir'd, and no room for a Dispensation. Tho this, supposing there are no Immoralities, &c. alledg'd, and prov'd against him. For shou'd things come to the worst, a sequestration of the profits of the Living might in time satisfy his Creditors, and if it be considerable, some allowance made out of it for his own Necessities, or upon such agreement made, he himself might serve the Cure, if it were not more adviseable to get a Chaplain's post at Sea, or in the Army, the readiest way to recover his shattered Fortunes.

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